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ABSTRACT

Hong Kong's Department of Information Services has been producing and systematically airing public service announcements (known as announcements in the public interest, or APIs) on a variety of selected themes such as cleaning up Hong Kong, road safety, crime, drugs, and health issues for over 20 years. The television announcements are shown every day during mandatory time slots within every prime time commercial break period. These announcements represent the most important means by which the Hong Kong government has consistently communicated directly to the public. In carrying out their task of encouraging citizen cooperation with anti-drug efforts, the APIs produce particular characterizations of drug users, potential drug users, and families of those who use drugs. These characterizations are central to the ability of APIs to engage members of their audience and work persuasively. This paper traces the development of depictions of the drug addict in Hong Kong's anti-drug API campaign from its inception in 1976 to the present, illustrating various stages of alteration that this image has undergone. The paper argues that the depiction of drug addicts in the earlier examples was very similar to the historically shameful image of the opium addict, which had been widely circulated throughout earlier decades of the 20th century. It finds that later announcements that make use of other visual and persuasive strategies such as metaphors and testimonials (which allow for some discussion of physical and health effects) do not directly call to mind the history of opium use by the Chinese. Contains 13 references and 2 illustrations. (NKA)

THE MYTHS OF CHINESE IMAGES REVISITED: PERSUASIVE STRATEGIES IN HONG KONG ANTI-DRUG PUBLIC SERVICE ANNOUNCEMENTS

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The Myths of Chinese Images Revisited: Persuasive Strategies in Hong Kong Anti-Drug Public Service Announcements

Introduction

For over 20 years, Hong Kong's Department of Information Services (DIS) has been producing and systematically airing public service announcements (known locally as announcements in the public interest or APIs) on a variety of selected themes such as cleaning up Hong Kong, road safety, crime, drugs, and health issues. The television announcements are shown every day during mandatory time slots within every prime time commercial break period. At present, in a one-month period, 30-35 different announcements are broadcast (DIS, 1998a, p. 4). Announcements of public interest are a familiar part of the Special Administrative Region's media culture, and it would be safe to say that nearly all Hong Kong residents have viewed samples of them. In addition to their familiarity to the public and their significance to media culture in Hong Kong, these announcements represent the most important means by which the Hong Kong government has

consistently communicated directly to the public. As Phelan (1991) notes, "the contemporary television public-service/ community campaign raises questions of politics and culture and thus fundamental questions of values" (p. 91). This paper examines anti-drug APIs produced and broadcast since 1976 (the first year in which anti-drug APIs were broadcast), examining the persuasive strategies employed within them and focusing on a particular set of negative images they often utilize. There are several formats of APIs, including films, still slides, and videos. This analysis includes films and videos, which are complex, varied and numerous, but does not include still slides, which are brief, simple, and relatively underrepresented.

The Department of Information Services, which designs and produces the announcements, makes all decisions about the scheduling timing and frequency for the APIs based on a monthly meeting between the Chief Information Officer in charge of the Promotions Office and "account executives of various campaign groups" (DIS, 1998a, p. 3). APIs are produced in relation to six major areas comprising ongoing campaigns, new policies and legislation, events, topical issues and problems, and recruitment of

volunteers. According to DIS, "such announcements are to provide information which the public needs to know" (DIS, 1998a, p. 1), and they have four primary functions with relation to the public: to inform about relevant government policies and public safety issues, to educate about the "rights and responsibilities of citizens," to enlist co-operation in dealing with important contemporary problems, and to help recruit volunteers to perform "duties of benefit to society" (DIS, 1998a, p. 1-2). Anti-drug APIs fit most clearly within the third function, since their aim is more related to enlisting citizen co-operation in combating the drug problem than with recruiting volunteers, informing about policy, or discussing the rights of citizens. The Action Committee Against Narcotics (ACAN) works closely with DIS in developing ideas for future APIs. ACAN is responsible for general community education and other anti-drug efforts including outreach to schools, participatory events, and the development of programs and instructional materials as well as information campaigns.

In carrying out their task of encouraging citizen cooperation with anti-drug efforts, their APIs produce particular characterizations of drug users, potential drug users, and families

of those who use drugs. These characterizations are central to the ability of APIs to engage members of their audience and work persuasively. Audience members should identify with positive characters (such as those who turn in drug suspects or call the police for help) and simultaneously dissociate themselves with troubled characters such as drug addicts and criminals. The figure of the down-and-out drug addict is often employed as a person with whom viewers do not want to identify. According to the APIs, his (and, in only two cases out of sixteen APIs focusing on addicts, her) life has been devastated by drug addiction, and the addict is depicted as having lost family, employment, friends, ambition, and self-esteem. This paper traces the development of depictions of the drug addict in Hong Kong's anti-drug API campaign from its inception in 1976 to the present, illustrating various stages of alteration that this image has undergone. It argues that the depiction of drug addicts in the earlier examples was very similar to the historically shameful image of the opium addict, which had been widely circulated throughout earlier decades of the 20th century. During the past 10 years, depictions are more positive,

less harmful, and less connected to shameful images of opium addicts borrowed from earlier eras in Hong Kong history.

Definitions

The scholarly literature on public service announcements is divided on the proper categorization for these messages, which are at least part propaganda, part informational, and part genuinely in the interests of the audience. According to Jowett and O'Donnell's (1992) definition of propaganda, most public service announcements can be considered a part of this category. They define propaganda as "the deliberate and systematic attempt to shape perceptions, manipulate cognition, and direct behavior to achieve a response that furthers the desired intent of the propagandist" (p. 4). Although the Hong Kong APIs and other announcements of their type fit this definition, public service announcements usually are not studied and examined as propaganda per se, because the larger category includes much more coercive, systematic, manipulative, and disingenuous techniques than those used in the relatively innocuous and information-based APIs. Thus, while we recognize that the APIs can be considered a

type of propaganda, we wish to use this fact primarily to emphasize the persuasive dimensions of APIs rather than to highlight any particularly insidious elements of them. Insofar as Hong Kong APIs can be considered propaganda, their persuasive functions are central, since "the purpose of propaganda is to send out an ideology to an audience with a related objective...there is a careful and predetermined plan of prefabricated symbol manipulation to communicate to an audience in order to reinforce or modify attitudes and/or behavior" (Jowett & O'Donnell, 1992, p. 2-3). Thus, we recognize that APIs are a type of propaganda and we focus on their ideological functions here. However, the following category of communication campaign provides a more useful framework for understanding the Hong Kong APIs.

APIs fit into the category of communication campaign at least as well as they do under the rubric of propaganda. The category of communication campaign is also quite broad, including instances of communication that have the following four basic characteristics: 1) the intention of creating particular effects or outcomes, 2) a large target audience, 3) a finite and known duration in time, and 4) an "organized set" of communicative

messages or "activities" (Perry, 1996, p. 127). Critical studies of communication campaigns emphasize the ways in which these campaigns convey value-laden definitions of social problems and suggestions for their elimination or cure (see Rakow, 1989). Perry (1996) notes that communication campaigns usually involve mass media and promote clearly expressed values. It is in this sense that the Hong Kong APIs can be considered ideological. They project images of the social good from particular perspective (Salmon, 1989), yet may appear to convey neutral information. Since they aim to cause particular outcomes, these campaigns, no matter how mundane the topic may seem, must be based on assumptions about what is wrong with a society and how the perceived problem can best be addressed. Communication campaigns, which clearly deal with social values, also necessarily convey ideology, "an unconscious set of values and beliefs which provide frames for our thinking and help make sense of the world" (Watson & Hill, 1994, p. 89). Rakow (1989) suggests that an institution that creates such campaigns can be understood as "ideological apparatuses" (p. 176).

This paper understands the Hong Kong APIs as a mild form of propaganda that can be better understood as a subset of

communication campaigns or alternatively as what some scholars have called "social advertising," or "the use of the advertising media for a social purpose" (Solomon, 1989). In this paper we use the words "announcement," "advertisement" and "ad" interchangeably to refer to API examples. The primary social purpose of Hong Kong anti-drug APIs shifts during the 25-year period under examination here. In the earlier examples, viewers are construed primarily as addicts and are encouraged to seek help, particularly at methadone clinics, since this service was newly introduced at the same time that the earliest anti-drug APIs were produced. Later, they shift to a focus on prevention, targeting a teenage audience and urging teens not to try drugs. Examples of both types are found throughout the period examined.

Hong Kong APIs as Discursive Practices

Observers of the relationship between Hong Kong's government have expressed concern that the colonial government took the position of "basically leaving the society alone," refusing "to serve as a model of moral virtues" and failing to "harbor many moral expectations for the people" (Martin and Wilson, 1997, p. 1;

see also Lau and Kuan, 1988; Lau, S.K., 1997; Wong and Cuklanz, 1999). Such frequently voiced claims provide a clear and pressing rationale for the examination of the APIs. Although the observation that Hong Kong's colonial government did not promote certain types of political participation, individual expression, or open questioning of governmental policy may be valid, these API texts clearly do express values and goals for the people and society of Hong Kong from the governmental perspective. Study of Hong Kong APIs can provide information on the discursive strategies of the British colonial government by revealing which values and ideals were framed as significant, and which behaviors were framed as praiseworthy. We can then consider whether these same themes are likely to be advanced in the post-colonial period in Hong Kong. In the case of anti-drug APIs, although many were produced in English and Cantonese versions, they all deal with Chinese families or individuals faced with the hardships and dilemmas of drug use. Clearly, then, their messages were intended to address drug problems within the Chinese community of Hong Kong, to encourage addicts to seek help and to urge young people to abstain from drug use.

The Opium War and Early Images of Drug Use in Hong Kong

The linkage to the Hong Kong Chinese community is significant in relation to the examination of images of drug abuse and drug addicts, because the earlier image of the opium user was of a lazy, self-destructive, skeletal, and weak Chinese man. Historically, the issue of opium abuse was significant in China, and opium use was understood as the main cause that had weakened China, making the country susceptible to attack and invasion by foreign powers. The British exported opium to China in exchange for Chinese merchandise such as tea and silk, even though the sale and use of opium had been forbidden by Chinese law since 1729. Many Chinese, particularly those who were less tempted by the corrupt trade in opium, recognized the harmful effects of the drug on Chinese people and on the effective functioning of society and politics. Opium was used as a substitute currency to pay for the Chinese goods. In the late Qing dynasty, an officer of the Qing government, Lin Tze Tsui, burned stocks of opium belonging to British merchants in Fumu, Guangdong, thus triggering the opium war in 1840. The end result of the war was the ceding of Hong

Kong to the British. Thus, the image of drugs and drug users has a long and well-recognized history to Chinese people.

Two cartoon examples of early representations of opium users are included here to illustrate the existence and longevity of the image of the destructive opium user. The first, "The Damages of Opium" (fig. 1), by Zheng Nuquan in 1920) depicts an opium smoker with an enormous pipe. Inside the pipe are depicted all sorts of goods representing various elements of fortune, including money, land and buildings, and what appears to be an entire city or culture. All these things are going "up in smoke" through the pipe, destroyed by the opium user whose eye peers languidly at the viewer of the cartoon. Two thin arms with clawlike fingers reach down to grasp the pipe and keep the supply of drugs steady. In the second example by Zheng Jiazhen in 1948 (fig. 2), the opium user himself is more fully depicted. Here the addict lies lifeless on the sofa. The Chinese characters meaning "opium" waft from the open window into his mouth in a plume of smoke, implying that he is enjoying opium smoking from an outside source, and the caption reads "law does not ban taking opium at home, but it bans possession of opium and opium pipes." The man lies in a barren

setting with little ornamentation or activity surrounding him. His body is emaciated and his head seems overly large in comparison. His eye is simply a blackened circle with no expression or life.

In both of these depictions are typical of the visual representation of opium users for decades in Hong Kong. The opium user himself was seen as an emaciated, gaunt and lifeless figure, almost always male, and never engaging in any activity other than procuring or taking drugs. His will to live and engage with other people seemed to have disappeared, leaving only a pathetic character obsessed with opium. The image of the opium user as Chinese was one of the common themes in Bruce Lee's movies, which often included plots involving self-strengthening, creating a strong and positive Chinese image associated with the ability to fight. The legendary Bruce Lee not only built up a positive, strong Chinese image to parallel that of the strong male in Western films, but also built up a modern Chinese image that counteracted the weak and damaging image of the opium addict. Apart from the image of the user himself, the effects of drug use were often also referred to in such images, as in the first example here. Personal, familial, and social damages were depicted. Since

users of opium were shown doing nothing but lying around and smoking, important elements of social and personal life were destroyed virtually in front of the user's eyes. These elements of the representation of the opium user can easily be seen in the early years of anti-drug APIs through the 1980s. However, the latest examples finally break free of these images and substitute alternatives in their place. The remainder of the paper explicates the API imagery surrounding the drug addict, concluding that that shift aware from this older image of the opium addict is mainly positive, though some important elements have also been omitted in recent examples.

Persuasive Strategies in Hong Kong's Anti-Drug APIs

As a group, these anti-drug APIs represent a wide range of persuasive approaches, including fear appeals, testimonial, appeals to hope and community, and metaphoric arguments. During the late seventies and throughout the eighties, negative images and fear appeals were emphasized, with images of poverty, ruined lives, and derelict addicts frequently appearing. Later, positive approaches relying on hope and community togetherness were employed, often

accompanied by up-beat music and images of alternatives to drug use. Still later, metaphoric and testimonial appeals are employed, suggesting through more subtle and less graphic means that drug use is the wrong path for youth to follow. Appeals to parental duty and guilt are also more common in the more recent years. Of all the various approaches employed, those making use of fear appeals combined with cause-effect reasoning are the most common, with wide-ranging effects of drug use depicted. Examples in this group often feature fear appeals focusing on the negative outcomes that can be the result of drug use, such as having a car accident, loss of one's family, arrest, ill health, and even death. Nine of the twenty-three anti-drug APIs produced since 1987 make use of these elements.

This paper undertakes a close examination of the more common negative-approach, since it is the predominant approach utilized in the anti-drug announcements throughout the history of Hong Kong's anti-drug APIs. Particular attention will be paid to the characterization of the drug addict in these announcements, since the addict is the central character within the negative-appeal examples and since the addict is also the character around which

the stories are built. The characterization of the Chinese drug addict (no non-Chinese addicts are depicted in these APIs) shifts notably over time. In the earlier examples, the addict is nearly always male, and is depicted as a haggard, devastated individual roaming the streets or huddling over a drug pipe in an alleyway. Later, in 1996, a series of three examples utilize metaphoric appeals that do not depict actual people at all. In these examples the life of the drug user is implicitly compared to a failing performance in three different arenas. Finally, in 1997, a testimonial example depicts a real (former) drug user telling the story of his life and comparing his current life to it.

The graphic image of the physically devastated drug addict disappears after "Blue Collar" in 1992, replaced first by metaphoric comparison and then by the real drug user. Thus, as this paper argues, the image of the ruined drug user popularized in earlier eras through depictions of opium addicts, was finally abandoned and replaced with less graphically negative alternatives. In effecting this replacement, the Hong Kong government effectively eliminated a negative and shameful image in favor of a less graphic and then less negative depiction. While the elimination

of this image can be seen as positive in that it wipes out a shameful image associated with cultural domination and shame in the past, the abandonment of the devastated drug addict image also effectively eliminates a focus on the health and lifestyle effects of drugs on the user's life. These elements may be important to keep at the forefront of an anti-drug effort, especially one that is heavily aimed at teenagers.

The Reinforcement of the Traditional Mythic Image, 1976-1992

As cartoon figures 1 and 2, and Bruce Lee's movies illustrate, a predominant traditional Chinese image was that of a weak, thin, short, individual with little ambition. The image usually depicted the Chinese person as lazy and unproductive, often in a reclining position or in the act of taking drugs. This sort of image was appropriated for use in the Hong Kong anti-drug APIs, thus making use of the connotations of national shame that accompanied the history of this image. In appropriating this negative image, the APIs often provided a healthy and positive contrasting image, clearing linking the weak, unproductive, and vulnerable addict image with disgrace and loss. Often the losses

caused by drug use are specifically enumerated in the API text, graphically illustrating the devastating effects of drug use on a person's life. As will be seen later in the paper, the image of the emaciated addict disappeared in anti-drug APIs produced after 1992.

A total of sixteen anti-drug APIs focus primarily on a depiction of the drug addict (or metaphoric reference to the drug addict) to construct their central fear appeal. Of these, the first twelve employ the same style and characterization of the addict, producing graphic depictions of the impoverished, aimless, and devastated addict and suggesting or explicitly stating that drug use has caused the addict's life to turn in this direction. These ten examples were produced between 1976 and 1992, with five produced in 1976, two produced in 1979, four produced between 1982 and 1987, and a final example ("Blue Collar") produced in 1992. In all ten of these examples, the addict is shown for a majority of the duration of the announcement, and emphasis is placed on his physically deteriorated condition, his inability to function in normal life, and his need to continually abuse drugs to survive.

In the first example (1976), a young man is shown purchasing drugs, which he immediately takes. He then becomes disoriented and wanders the streets, eventually focusing on a man to rob so that he can buy more drugs. He attacks the man, knocks him down, and steals his wallet, running off with his prize with the man shouting after him. The emphasis is on the desperation of the addict, who has to stoop so low as to attack a respectable and innocent person in the street in order to keep up his habit. A series of three examples also produced in 1976 combine fictional enactment with testimonial. In these, public personalities (a kung-fu actor, a news anchor, and a photographer) each tell the viewer why they would never abuse drugs, because their professional performance would suffer and their careers would be ruined. In each of these three examples, an image of the famous person in bad, wrapped in sheets, and sweating and shaking from the effects of drug use is intercut with the real-life person commenting on the dangers of drug use. Thus, the image of the completely immobilized addict is juxtaposed and contrasted to that of the healthy and effective professional. The audience is asked to

visualize the devastating effects that drug use would have on anyone, with quite a bit of help from the visuals provided.

The 1976 examples also include "Healthy Alternative" (1976), which again contrasts the healthy individual to the addicted version. In this example, the image of a young man addicted to drugs is intercut with images of the same man enjoying leisure activities with his girlfriend. As the man and woman go bowling, walk in the park and embrace, the haunting image of the drug addict is shown huddled in a corner and smoking drugs. Again the contrast between healthy life and life on drugs is made clear, but this time with a purely fictional example rather then by including testimonials from actual personalities.

Two examples, entitled "Year of the Child" (1979) and "Family" (1986-87) focus on children as the victims of drug abuse, depicting graphic images of addicted parents to make their point. In the former example, a young boy wanders the streets while the voice-over notes that "some children are unlucky, they have a drug addict for a parent." The boy rounds a corner to witness his father smoking on the staircase, unaware of his surroundings and his son. The boy continues wandering aimlessly, as the narrative concludes

"for your children's sake, don't do drugs." A second examples is very similar, but focuses on the addiction of babies born to mothers who are addicts. Here the depiction is particularly graphic, as a series of happy images of children playing with their parents is contrasted to the final image of a mother and baby in a darkened room. The mother, with her back turned to her baby, smokes drugs while the baby screams and cries from the pangs of its own addiction. Viewers are informed that babies can be born drug addicts and that mothers-to-be should not try drugs for any reason.

Another pair of APIs, one produced in 1979 and one produced in 1984, are both entitled "Methadone." Both focus on the addict and encourage addicts to seek help at a methadone clinic. The first of these notes that it is "crazy to take drugs" and urges viewers to break the habit and start a new life. The visuals depict a man taking drugs, running from the police, and being arrested. The later "Methadone" API similarly depicts several scenes from the addict's life, but this one focuses on his loss of friends and loss of the will to live, assuring viewers that heroine addicts often "forget what it's like to be alive." The addict is depicted as losing his friends and having nowhere to turn until he

finds the methadone clinic. Again the addict has lost everything and appears aimless, gaunt, and miserable.

Two final examples complete the set of APIs depicting the drug addict in the traditional way, focusing on a fictionalized representation of a person who has lost family and friends, livelihood and position, and whose appearance is gaunt, dirty, and devastated. In the first, a "perfect couple" are depicted, contrasted quickly with images of the male partner from the couple descending into the ill effects of drug addiction. A narrative voice-over explains that the boyfriend started taking drugs and "inevitably" tried to entice his girlfriend to do the same. However, "she was strong" and was able to resist and find new friends and a new life. Like most other examples of this type, then, it depicts an alternative healthy lifestyle along with the ruined life of the addict. In this example, the depiction of the addicts ruination is especially graphic. He is shown looking worse and worse, and is rejected by his former friends and girlfriend. In the final frame he is seen dirty and thin, in tattered clothing, squatting in the gutter with his head in his hands. "Blue Collar" (1992) is the final example, and it closely follows the "perfect couple" story, substituting a young

family for a young romance. In this example the main character is first depicted as a happy father with a young wife and child. Immediately, negative images of the man taking drugs, running from the police, and being arrested are intercut with images of his family. The announcement ends with the voice-over urging addicts to call a hotline number, thus once again reinforcing the possibility of getting away from drug use and finding a better life.

After the production of "Blue Collar" in 1992, the remaining anti-drug APIs have not made use of the traditional image of the emaciated, lifeless, and ruined drug addict. Rather, at first a series of three examples utilize metaphoric representations to suggest the harmful effects of drug use without graphic illustration. These three announcements depict a pinball game, video game, and karaoke singer doing well and then suddenly failing and "crashing." Only the karaoke example depicts a real person at all. The other two simply show the progress of the game and the "loss of game" at the end. Voice-overs in these example ask viewers if they "still want to play," thus further making a linkage between drug use and bad performance in real-life activities. After these three APIs, a final example was produced, with a totally new

approach. In this one, entitled "Heart to Heart" (1997). Here a former drug addict discusses his former life in realistic terms. He hold up a photograph of himself when he was very thin due to his drug addiction, and says that he didn't care about anything, even eating. The photograph is reminiscent of the typical image of the drug addict, but is occupies only a small part of this announcement. The rest focuses on the former addict in his current state, healthy and free of addiction. He urges young people to stay away from drugs and find other alternatives in life.

Conclusion

Hong Kong anti-drug announcements of public interest continued to depict the traditional weak, thin, and lethargic Chinese image through 1992, but did not produce any APIs with this image as their main visual strategy in later years. The APIs that made use of the negative devastated image of the drug user consistently contrasted this image with intercut images of positive, drug-free life. Undoubtedly the history of opium use and its relation to China's national shame produced one set of important connotations for Chinese audiences of these announcements. In

addition, the negative image probably persisted due to its ability to graphically illustrate the health effects of drugs on individual users. Later announcements that make use of other visual and persuasive strategies such as metaphors and testimonials do not directly call to mind the history of opium use by Chinese people. As such they leave behind the visual-historical link with opium use, but in doing so they also omit appeals that rely heavily on representations of the physical health effects of drug use on the individual addict. From this perspective, the testimonial approach may be seen as the best choice, since it does not serve as such a direct reminder of the negative image of the opium addict, but it still allows for some discussion of physical and health effects.

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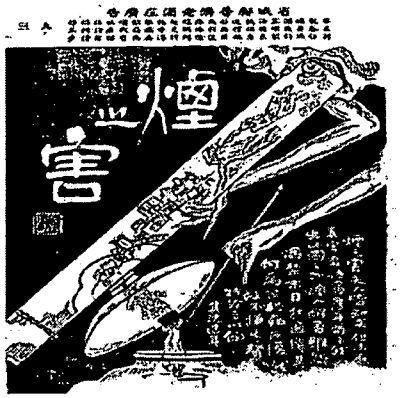
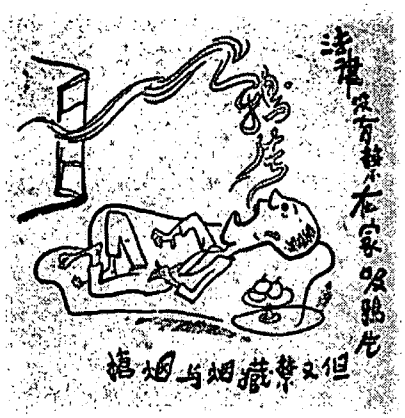


Title: The Damages of Opium; Cartoonist: Zheng Nuquan; Source: *Renjian Huabao,* 1920



Narration: Law does not ban taking opium at home, but it bans possession of opium and opium pipes; Cartoons: Zheng Jiazhen; Source: *This Age of Cartoons*, 1948

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